

Durham Research Online

Deposited in DRO:

20 October 2017

Version of attached file:

Published Version

Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

Citation for published item:

Bridges, Venetia (2016) 'Antique authorities ? 'classicizing' poetry of the 1180s.', *Interfaces : a journal of medieval European literature.*, 3 . pp. 143-161.

Further information on publisher's website:

<https://doi.org/10.13130/interfaces-7558>

Publisher's copyright statement:

This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution CC BY-SA 4.0 licence which allows readers to copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format, and to remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially, as long as the original author is credited and as long as any works that are derived from the original are distributed under the same terms.

Additional information:

Use policy

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced, and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes provided that:

- a full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- a [link](#) is made to the metadata record in DRO
- the full-text is not changed in any way

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

Please consult the [full DRO policy](#) for further details.

Antique Authorities? 'Classicizing' Poems of the 1180s

Abstract

* I am grateful to my colleagues at the Centre for Medieval Literature in Odense and York, the participants in the 'Classics in the Middle Ages' conference, and the anonymous reviewers for their helpful contributions to this article.

The 'twelfth-century Renaissance' was based on the rediscovery of classical texts and traditions, and inspired new works based on these well-known materials. However, the nature of many of these new works, often described as 'classicizing poetry,' has not been closely studied. This article considers two connected Latin poems – the *Alexandreis* and the *Anticlaudianus* – composed in the 1180s in northern France, in terms of their relationships with the classics and also with each other. Taking as its starting point the idea that classical reception could be a debated phenomenon (Mora), the essay argues that this is indeed the case, and that for these poems this debate concerns hermeneutic traditions rather than the classics directly. It concludes that the wide variety of poetic and interpretative techniques in the poems is an implicit sign of passionate interest and disagreement in the poetics of *translatio studii* during this period.*

1. The classic study is still Haskins. A more recent compendium is Benson and Constable with Lanham.

The "Renaissance of the 12th century" is an umbrella term that covers a large variety of interests and movements, languages and texts, connected in broad terms by their use and adaptation of classical material.¹ In this essay I shall focus on the character of this 'Renaissance' at a particular time in northern France, the decade between 1180 and 1190, and in the context of what we would now call literary fiction, that is, 'original,' imaginative writing that was nevertheless inspired by and deeply indebted to classical texts. This twelfth-century literature blurs the already-fluid boundaries between textual acts of reception, adaptation and re-writing in the High Middle Ages, meaning that its texts may provide us with different perspectives on the literary-cultural conditions of this 'Renaissance' from studies that focus primarily on intellectual history and manuscript transmission.

The multifaceted and complex situation of *translatio studii* in the late twelfth century in general, and in precisely this period and area of France in particular, has been vividly described by Francine Mora (213):

Au XII^e siècle la réception de l'Antiquité était loin d'être sereine: elle suscitait des polémiques et déclenchait des passions, à la mesure des enjeux mis en oeuvre par sa redécouverte et son assimilation.

Mora highlights the idea that classical reception could be a contested phenomenon, with polemics and passions interrupting the serene flow of classical transmission into the Middle Ages. She focuses on twelfth-century reworkings of the Troy narrative, seeing authors as competing and disagreeing with one another over its interpretation. From a contemporary medieval perspective, John of Salisbury's (attributed to Bernard of Chartres) famous description about "dwarves standing on the shoulders of giants" (III.4.46-50, 142) also relates strongly to the internecine strife that Mora describes: it is a vital reminder of the complexities of the relationships between "dwarves and giants," or antique and modern (medieval) writers, as perceived by a contemporary thinker. Where Mora's synchronic observations focus on the twelfth century, however, John reminds us of the diachronic perspective: not only are the writers of both eras intimately joined, but their physical juxtaposition causes simultaneous superiority and inferiority on the part of the "moderns," a consciousness of greater illumination but lesser ability. This image should remind us of the emotions, Mora's polemics and passions, which the inheritance and transmission of materials (summed up in the phrase *translatio studii*) could evoke. Classical reception and adaptation in both diachronic and synchronic forms, then, may well be a fraught enterprise during the 1180s and 90s as much-loved and authoritative texts and traditions inspire new, soon-to-be-canonical literature that in turn generates its own responses. Understanding this literature therefore means reading with an eye for its relationships with the medieval present as well as with the classical past.

However, there is another dimension involved, one that complicates any clear-cut distinction between past and present, and that also introduces vital questions of hermeneutics. During the twelfth century, the classics of ancient literary culture were read and understood using texts composed in late antiquity, such as Macrobius' *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* (fifth century CE) and Fulgentius' commentary on the *Aeneid* (sixth century). These texts were neither contemporary (to medieval eyes) nor from classical antiquity, and thus complicated any easy separation of the two time periods. As well as nuancing chronology, however, these late antique texts popularized hermeneutic methods for reading the classics that had

2. On late antique hermeneutics in general, see Lamberton; for allegory in particular, see chapter 4, "The Interaction of Allegorical Interpretation and Deliberate Allegory," 144–61.

3. Martianus Capella's *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* (early fifth century) is another example of such allegorical composition.

4. All four poems were composed in the area encompassing Paris, Reims, Rouen and Chartres; the *Anticlaudianus*, *Architrenius* and *Ylias* all contain intertextual references to the *Alexandreis*.

a profound impact on the Middle Ages.² For example, allegorical hermeneutics, already a popular mode of interpretation in pagan late antiquity but crucially also a method perceived in the Bible itself and thus available for Christians, helped to provide ancient texts with meanings consonant with medieval Christianity (such as the idea, itself ancient, of reading Virgil's Fourth *Eclogue* as a prophecy of the Christian Messiah rather than solely as heralding the birth of Augustus; Conte 267). This late antique hermeneutic habit was not confined to the interpretation of classical and Biblical works, however, but was used to create new texts. Prudentius' *Psychomachia* from the fourth century is a well-known example of such a 'new' text, which uses classically-inspired personification allegory to describe the battle of vices and virtues.³ This creative and interpretative trend continued during the High Middle Ages and the twelfth-century 'Renaissance,' as the works of Bernard Silvestris, the *Cosmographia* and the often-attributed *Commentary on Virgil's Aeneid*, demonstrate. So the influence of late antiquity on medieval poetry is not simply in terms of complicating periodization, itself an intriguing issue, but potentially has hermeneutic ramifications as well. These ramifications may also be a factor in the polemics and passions Mora highlights in late twelfth-century literature.

This literature includes four Latin poems that loom large over literary history. They are the *Alexandreis* of Walter of Châtillon, the *Anticlaudianus* of Alan of Lille, the *Architrenius* of John of Hauville, and the *Ylias* of Joseph of Exeter. All of them are inspired by classical materials and styles, and thus they have been grouped together as 'classicizing poetry' (Tilliette 5–40). This grouping highlights their general interest in classical texts, it acknowledges their probable geographical proximity, and it also allows for the potential influence of the *Alexandreis* upon the other three texts, all of which refer to the former poem or are influenced by it.⁴ It also recognizes the four works' collocation in at least one thirteenth-century manuscript, Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 406, which may indicate recognition of thematic and/or stylistic similarities shared between them. Yet this grouping needs to be investigated further to develop our understanding of what 'classicizing poetry' is in this era, since the poems are very different in character. Although all four are composed in the same metre (dactylic hexameter, the metre of Greek and Latin epics), their subject matter is diverse. The *Alexandreis* recounts the story Alexander the Great, with a historical focus; the *Anticlaudianus* tells of the journey of Prudence to heaven in order to gain a soul for

Nature's perfect "New Man;" the *Architrenius* describes the wanderings of the "Arch-Weeper" in his quest to ask Nature why she has abandoned mankind to evil and grief; and the *Ylias* is an account of the Trojan War based on the version of Dares Phrygius. The philosophical and spiritual preoccupations of the *Anticlaudianus* and the *Architrenius* in particular differ from the historical narratives of the other two poems, meaning that variety is an important feature within this group of texts. This variety is hardly a surprise, and neither is the four poems' shared interest in classical imitation, given the intellectual milieu of their composition. It remains to be seen, however, whether and how this consciousness of pluralism in 'classicizing poetry' relates to Mora's passions and polemics over *translatio studii*. To consider this large topic, I shall discuss two of the texts, the *Alexandreis* and the *Anticlaudianus*, and their relationship both with classical material and also to each other. These linked questions will give us greater insight into the particular conditions of *translatio studii* in late twelfth-century France.

Alexandreis

The *Alexandreis* is the earliest of the texts, published probably in the spring of 1180, and the one that therefore may have instituted a fashion for classicizing epic in the decade that followed, given its apparent intertextual influences.⁵ It was dedicated to the archbishop of Reims, William of Champagne, who had Capetian connections (he was king Louis VII's brother-in-law), and is a life of Alexander the Great in ten books. Its material source is Quintus Curtius Rufus's prose account, *Historiae Alexandri magni*, but its collective stylistic influences include Lucan, Statius, Virgil and Ovid: for example, Charles Fraker has suggested the *Alexandreis* (in common with the *Ylias*) is characterized by what he calls a "mixed media Ovidian-Lucanesque narrative mode" (126) that highlights the more discursive nature of the narrative. Although Fraker overstates the non-narrative aspect of the *Alexandreis*'s poetics, his emphasis on the *Alexandreis*'s multifaceted relationships with classical poetry is a useful insight, since it demonstrates again the complex nature of the phenomenon we describe as 'reception' or *translatio studii*. Despite its classical influences, the *Alexandreis* is no slavish imitation of antique epic, but a sophisticated response (or set of responses) to an inherited narrative whose poetics are summed up perceptively by Peter

5. The question of the poem's dating is complicated and has been much debated. I follow Adkin's analysis in "The Date of Walter of Châtillon's *Alexandreis* Once Again," which discusses the possibilities before reiterating his belief that the work was promulgated in the spring of 1180.

Dronke as “*sic et non*” (189, 190), or multiple, potentially contradictory, and certainly complicated.

This point about reception is crucial in light of an important aspect of the *Alexandreis* that is harder to locate in terms of antique influences than its general style and material sources, namely the ecphrases that are an important (and lengthy) feature of the poem. There are three major ones: Darius’ shield in book I, his wife Stateira’s tomb in book IV, and then Darius’ own tomb in book VII (*Alexandreis*). Whilst ecphrasis itself is of course a feature of epic poetry going back to Homer, it is noticeable that the *Alexandreis*’s ecphrases often “refus[e] to behave as epic,” to use David Townsend’s phrase, breaking with classical traditions in their minimal descriptive detail or ornamentation (“Other Voices and Other Visions” 32). These descriptive passages are some of the most-copied parts of the poem in the Middle Ages and the most-discussed aspects in modern times, since they seem simultaneously to reflect and to rewrite classical habits of ecphrasis, and thus to be a distinctive and individual feature of the poem’s *translatio studii*.⁶ They are therefore crucial both to the question of the poem’s relationship with classical material and also to the wider question of the nature of ‘classicizing’ poetry in the 1180s.

I shall only discuss one passage in detail here, the description of the tomb of Stateira, which is over 100 lines long. The following lines are representative of the ecphrasis’s style (*Alexandreis* IV. 223–39; Townsend, *Twelfth-Century Epic*).

Altera picturae sequitur distinctio, reges
 Aggrediens et funus Heli Samuelis ab ortu.
 Murmurat in Silo populus. de Benjamin exit
 Qui regat Hebreos, sed enim quia dissonat eius
 Principio finis, Ysai de semine princeps
 Preficitur populo, qui contudit arma Goliae,
 Inque acie belli cum prole cadente tyranno,
 Regia desertos dampnat maledictio montes.
 Hic Asael Abnerque cadunt, incurrit Vrias
 Quam tulerat mortem. patricidam detinet arbor
 Quem fodit hasta uiri. patriam lugere putares
 Effigiem. sed postquam humanitus accidit illi,
 Construitur templum, uiuunt mandata sepulti
 Pacifico regnante patris, nec sacra tuetur
 Ara Ioab, Semeique uorax intercipit ensis.

6. For detailed discussion of the ecphrases, see Lafferty, “Mapping Human Limitations” and *Epic and the Problem of Historical Understanding* (which share material); Townsend, “Other Voices and Other Visions;” Ratkowitsch; Adkin, “*Alexandreis* IV 206–07;” and Bridges.

Consilio iuuenum phariseat scisma perhenne
Cum regno populum. lis est de diuite regno.

(A new division of the picture's space treats of the Kings, of Eli's death, the birth of Samuel. At Shiloh the people murmur. From Benjamin comes forth a man to rule the Hebrews. But because his end ill fits his origins the scion of Jesse who smote Goliath's arms is raised as prince over the people. But when the tyrant falls in the thick of battle with his son the king's curse rages in the empty hills. Here Asahel and Abner fall. Uriah incurs the death he carried. In the tree the patricide hangs trapped pierced by a spear. (You might well think the father's image grieved.) And after he has suffered man's shared fate the temple is built. While the peaceful reigns his buried father's laws live on. Nor does the sacred altar shelter Joab. And the thirsty sword requires Shimei's life. Unending schism sunders land and folk through young men's counsel. For the kingdom's wealth contention swells.)

Stateira's monument is covered with images of Jewish history; the representative section quoted here mostly describes events from David's kingship, for example. These events are irrelevant both to Stateira and to the main narrative of Alexander's conquests, so that the description appears not to be integrated with the narrative. Stylistically, it is terse and allusive, requiring extra-textual Biblical knowledge to be understood – "patricidam detinet arbor/ Quem fodit hasta uiri," "in the tree the patricide hangs trapped/pierced by a spear" is a circumlocutory reference to the death of David's son Absalom, for example. Such obscure references make identification difficult, perhaps deliberately, especially when combined with brevity of style. The passage is a puzzle, grammatically, stylistically, and in terms of its narrative: it does not behave like classical epic, despite its ecphrastic nature. This deliberate upsetting of classical habits of description may indicate that the passage's meanings relate more to contemporary medieval than to classical literary culture.

One demonstrable feature of this difficult passage is its historical focus. It is concerned with salvation history, ending with the Incarnation, which as noted above is incomprehensible within the time-frame of the main narrative. Lafferty notes that all the ecphrases "present a variety of histories, each drawn from a different tradition, and demonstrate the limitations inherent in each" (*Epic and the Problem of Historical Understanding* 140). Here, the point being made

is surely that several of these histories are in tension with one another. The Judaeo-Christian events described are incomprehensible to the Alexander narrative, as Lafferty points out, but in addition the Christian perspective necessary for understanding this passage as salvation history does not relate to the surrounding narrative either, which is focused upon the conflict between Alexander and Darius. In effect, two wholly separate historical narratives are occupying the same textual space, but actively not relating to one another. Walter's poetics here highlight the fact that one historical narrative cannot always interpret another. This is significant, since the idea that one narrative can describe a second is the key basis for allegorical interpretation (in particular typology), a vital contemporary method of *translatio studii* for classical material in particular since it allowed pre-Christian texts and figures to become Christian allegories.⁷ Walter is apparently deliberately repudiating allegory as a hermeneutic, at least with relation to the Alexander narrative, in an act of historical separatism.

In this instance, the *Alexandreis's* descriptive poetics relate as strongly, if not more so, to contemporary habits of *translatio studii* than to classical literature. This becomes apparent when we consider the contemporary fondness for *descriptio*, a major feature of style guides like the *artes poeticae* or *versificatoriae* so common at the end of the twelfth century. In both Latin and French contemporary texts, florid and lengthy *descriptio* is a common occurrence, as these examples from Alan of Lille's *Anticlaudianus* (1181–84) and the *Roman d'Alexandre* (c. 1180–85) demonstrate.

Anticlaudianus

Surgit ad hoc placidi uultus gestusque modesti
 Circumscripta modum Prudencia. Colla pererrat
 Aurea cesaries, sed acus mediata refrenat
 Litigium crinis et regula pectinis instat.
 Ordo supercilii, iusto libramine ductus,
 Nec nimis exhaustus nec multa nube pilorum
 Luxurians, sese geminos exemplat in arcus.
 Luminis astra iubar, frons lilia, balsama naris,
 Dens ebur osque rosam parit, offert, reddit, adequat;
 Spirat in ore color uiuus nec candor adulter
 Turpiter effingit tanti phantasma decoris. (*Anticlaudianus*
 1.270–80)

7. Typology was not solely used for Christian purposes: for example, Trojan (or other classical) descent was used to legitimize the claims to rule of many European dynasties without reference to Christianity.

(Here Prudence, set apart by the restraint shown in her quiet mien and reserved manner, arises. Her golden tresses fall around her neck but a hair-pin parts them and checks the struggling locks and a comb imposes its rule upon them. Her well-ordered brows, in proper balance arranged, neither too light nor beclouded with luxuriant growth, resemble twin crescents. Her radiant eyes give forth starlight, her forehead stands forth lily-like, her nose gives balsam-odour, her teeth rival ivory, her mouth, the rose. Living colour glows upon her face and no adventitious lustre makes its disgraceful contribution to the image of a beauty so great. - Sheridan)

Roman d'Alexandre

Onques n'i ot quarrel ne pierre ni ciment,
 Ne n'i ot point de fust, n'en i covint noient;
 Deus cens charees d'or et autrestant d'argent
 Firent autresi maurre commë on meut forment;
 Le blanc et le vermeil i mirent sagement,
 Et le vert et le bis, trestout melleement.
 Quatre ymages d'yvoire mirent el fondement,
 Et ot chascune teste, par le mien ensient;
 Et avoit entredeus de terrë un arpent ...
 Les fenestres sont faites d'une pel de serpent;
 Qant vient el mois de may, que li soleus respilent,
 Tres par mi cele pel li rais lai ens s'estent,
 Car la pel est si clere que riens ne li deffent. (*Alexandre*
 IV.1496-504, 1513-16)

(Le tombeau ne contenait ni bloc de pierre ni ciment, ni le moindre morceau de bois; on n'en avait besoin. On prit deux cents charretées d'or et autant d'argent, qu'on fit moudre comme de la farine; on y incorpora habilement du blanc et du vermeil, du vert et du bis, tout ensemble. On plaça tout en bas quatre statues d'ivoire séparées l'une de l'autre par un arpent de terre, et dont les têtes supportaient le reste de l'édifice ... Les fenêtres sont faites d'une peau de serpent: quand vient le mois de mai, que le soleil resplendit, les rayons traversent les fenêtres, tant la peau en est fine. - Harf-Lancner, *Alexandre*)

Both these texts highlight the medieval interest in elaborate and long-winded *descriptio* that the *Alexandreis*'s ecphrases also share. The *Anticlaudianus* lines are a familiar description of feminine beauty (here featuring Prudence), but the passage from the *Roman d'Alexandre*, compiled probably just after the *Alexandreis* between 1180 and 1185, is also a tomb ecphrasis. However, the two poems' tomb descriptions are very different. The French passage is a much more sensory and vivid description from that seen in the Latin poem, expansive in style and wondering in tone with its fantastical architecture, ivory statues and snakeskin windows; it could hardly contrast more with the *Alexandreis*'s stylistically terse, allusive and almost anti-visual historical approach. The *Anticlaudianus*'s *descriptio* in turn is much more akin to the French *Alexandre* than it is to the Latin *Alexandreis*, with which intellectually and linguistically it seems to have far more in common. So although all three works demonstrate the contemporary fashion for elaborate *descriptio*, the *Alexandreis* is the polar opposite of the other two texts in its style and approach. The Latin work's sparse style and historical separatism contrast strongly, and to my mind deliberately, with its contemporaries, both French and Latin. The dates of romances like the *romans antiques* (c. 1150–65) make it highly possible and, as I have argued elsewhere (Bridges), probable that the *Alexandreis* is a conscious negative reaction to the expansive and lengthy descriptions seen in these mid-century texts, as well as in contemporary Latin verse.

This observation clarifies the fact that it is contemporary literary culture, not classical modes of composition, which is primarily driving the *Alexandreis*'s poetics of *translatio studii* here. Further, these poetics highlight a current debate within this literary culture over *descriptio* as it appears in both romance and Latin texts, a debate in which the *Alexandreis* takes a polemical stance against description as it is frequently composed.

The idea of the poem as influenced by contemporary fashions and debates in its classical reception is given further support if we consider its interest in historical narrative beyond the ecphrases. Given the subject matter of the poem, its historical focus is natural and inevitable. Yet the *Alexandreis*'s historicity goes beyond its *materia* and its descriptions. One of the aspects that has aroused the most critical attention is the figure of Alexander himself in moral terms.⁸ What is most interesting about this debate is that the narrative, despite claiming “*magnus in exemplo est*” (“the Great One is an example”) at the end of the *Alexandreis* (x.448), provides contrasting clues

8. A nuanced account is given by Harf-Lancner, “Un héros de la démesure,” who rightly claims that Alexander is “un héros ambigu” rather than definitively positive or negative (52).

as to Alexander's ultimate 'meaning.' He is both a noble conqueror who dispenses justice mildly to the conquered nations at the high point of his career (VI.11–15) and also, in terms reminiscent of Claudian's Rufinus and Lucan's Caesar, an increasingly deranged madman who is addressed as "o demens" (X.193). This ethical ambivalence makes it difficult for the Macedonian to be a straightforward *speculum principis*, although this interpretation has been popular throughout the twentieth century with reference to the young Philip II of France (Christensen 9–10; Townsend, *Twelfth-Century Epic* 126, n.4). In addition to this ethical ambivalence, it is suggestive to notice what the Alexander of the *Alexandreis* is not: in contrast to other contemporary texts' re-imagined classical heroes, he is not recreated as a chivalric model, but kept as a firmly classical and historical figure (with no knowledge of Christianity, for example). Part of this is no doubt due to his Latinity; vernacular texts, like the *Roman d'Alexandre*, situate their narratives and characters in contemporary medieval surroundings with far greater ease given the contemporary nature of their language. Yet, as other Latin poems of the 1180s, in particular the *Architrenius*, demonstrate, depicting classical figures so strongly in terms of their historicity is not inevitable. Combined with the interest in history demonstrated in the ecphrases, the *Alexandreis*'s refusal to make its Alexander equate to a contemporary medieval prince again differentiates it somewhat from its contemporaries' *translatio*, whether they are composed in French or in Latin.

So the *Alexandreis*, despite its undeniable classical inspiration, is a work that implicitly engages with contemporary literary fashions found across both French and Latin literature, often in a negative sense. This supports Mora's perception of variety in, and potentially debate about, *translatio studii*. Crucially, however, this analysis has extended her observation, demonstrating that it is true not simply between Latin and vernacular texts but also transcends linguistic difference. What remains to be seen is whether this varied *translatio* and debate, is also a feature of other 1180s 'classicizing' Latin poetry.

Anticlaudianus

The *Anticlaudianus* of Alan of Lille is a very different poem from the *Alexandreis*, but one that nevertheless has intriguing connections with the latter. Probably published between 1181 and 1184, and possibly between 1182 and 1183 (Hutchings 7, 13; Gibson *et al.*), it is usual-

ly found in nine books, and is the story of Nature's quest to create a new, perfect man, for which she needs a soul. Prudence, aided by Reason and other virtues, undertakes the journey from earth to heaven to ask God for this soul, and returns to earth with it. Nature then creates the perfect New Man, who defeats various vices in combat. The full title is usually given as *Anticlaudianus de Antirufino* ("The Antithesis of Claudian's *Against Rufinus*"), with a common subtitle in the manuscripts being "de officio viri boni et perfecti libri novem." This suggests that the *Anticlaudianus* is a conscious response to Claudian's poem, in which Alan will depict the completely good man in answer to the entirely evil Rufinus. Claudian's poem, however, is far shorter, in only two books, and purports to be a historical narrative of imperial events of the late fourth century CE; in contrast, the *Anticlaudianus* is a narrative with a spiritual imperative. Although both poems have an ethical dimension, this is far more important in the *Anticlaudianus*, which ends with the triumphant victory of the New Man over evil. This spiritually and morally driven work therefore appears to differ from both Claudian's poem and even more so from the *Alexandreis*. However, both the twelfth-century poems are inspired by classical material, especially that which we now call 'epic': the *Alexandreis*, as already discussed, not only retells an antique narrative but is inspired stylistically by Lucan, Ovid and Virgil. Similarly, the *Anticlaudianus*'s depiction of the final battle between the New Man and the vices relies on traditional tropes found in classical poetry (IX.1–10; Sheridan).

Iam pedites in bella ruunt, iam sanguinis audent
Fundere primicias, iam libamenta cruoris
Prima dare affectant primeuaque uulnera belli.
Pulueris insurgunt nebule, nouus imber inundat
In terris, dum tela pluunt, dum pulueris imber
Funditur, et celum telorum nubila uelant,
Et ferri splendore nouo noua fulgura lucent.
Mente calens, feruens animo, flammata furore,
Prima uiro mouet assultus Discordia, primum
Aggreditur Martem, primo casura tumultu.

(Now the infantry rush into battle, now they dare to shed first blood, now they seek to pour the first libations of gore and inflict the first wounds of war. Clouds of dust arise; a strange shower falls heavy on earth as missiles rain down, while the

Maevius, in celos audens os ponere mutum,
 Gesta ducis Macedum tenebrosi carminis umbra
 Pingere dum temptat, in primo limine fessus
 Heret et ignauam queritur torpescere musam.

(However, a saddish painting, displaying a less noble aspect of beauty, covers the most recently allotted space there [...] The painting's face seems distracted and to be begging a better form, but neither the glitter of gems, day-bright in splendour, nor the gleam of silver or gold with its more attractive sheen can serve as a defence for the full-blown crime represented in the painting or keep it from growing dull and pale amidst its gold. There our own Ennius in a patch-work poem writes for the mob and thunders forth the fortunes of Priam. There Maevius, daring to raise a dumb mouth to heaven, tries to portray the exploits of the Macedonian leader in a dark and shadowy ode; tired, he is slowed down at the very beginning of the course and complains that his muse grows slow and listless.)

Here Alan uses Maevius, the Augustan poet criticized by Virgil and Horace, to mark his disapproval of Walter's "gesta ducis Macedum," using the opening words of Walter's poem to underline the identification. Neil Adkin has explained Alan's animosity towards the *Alexandreis* and its author as arising out of professional jealousy, claiming that the figure of the New Man in the *Anticlaudianus* was intended (among other allegorical possibilities) to praise Philip Augustus, and that when Alan read the *Alexandreis* he realized he had been preempted ("Alan of Lille on Walter of Châtillon" 308–09). This may be part of the reason for Alan's dislike of the poem, but literary envy does not explain why he invokes a poem he dislikes so explicitly. The young Philip Augustus was always going to be lauded in multiple literary works, and there was surely room for both in the vibrant culture of *belles lettres* of late twelfth-century northern France. So what exactly was it about the *Alexandreis*, beyond professional jealousy, that aroused Alan's ire?

Adkin concludes that Alan's criticism of the *Alexandreis* is two-fold, referring both to Walter's claim to be as great a poet as Virgil in the *Alexandreis*'s prologue, and also to instances within the text of the *Alexandreis*. Whilst Alan's hostility to the first is understandable, the second criticism is more obscure and merits further consideration. Adkin claims that Alan's criticism of Walter's poem relates to the dou-

ble identification of two French kings with Alexander, firstly the very ill Louis VII (who was on his death-bed in spring 1180) and then his son Philip Augustus (newly-crowned in spring 1180). The first instance occurs in the *Alexandreis*'s proem, where Walter obliquely refers to Louis VII's illness ("the ravages of age") in lines that no longer make sense when Alan is writing because Louis is now dead:

Alexandreis 1.5–8

Qui si senior non fractus inermi
Pollice Fatorum nostros uixisset in annos,
Cesareos numquam loqueretur fama triumphos,
Totaque Romuleae squaleret gloria gentis.

(Had sufferance of the Fates allowed this man [Alexander] to live until our own day, unbroken by the ravages of age, Fame never would have sung the victory-song for Caesar, and all glory of Rome's race would lie abject. - Townsend, *Twelfth-Century Epic*)

The second instance is at the end of book v, where Alexander appears to be identified with the young Philip Augustus, whom the poet hopes will lead Christianity to dominate the world.

Alexandreis v.510–20

Si gemitu commota pio uotisue suorum
Flebilibus diuina daret clementia talem
Francorum regem, toto radiaret in orbe
Haut mora uera fides, et nostris fracta sub armis
Parthia baptismo renouari posceret ultro,
Queque diu iacuit effusis menibus alta
Ad nomen Christi Kartago resurgeret, et quas
Sub Karolo meruit Hyspania soluere penas
Exigerent uexilla crucis, gens omnis et omnis
Lingua Ihesum caneret et non inuita subiret
Sacrum sub sacro Remorum presule fontem.

(If pious prayers and tearful lamentation moved mercy from on high to grant the Franks a king like this [Alexander], the True Faith would shine forth unhindered through the earth, and Parthia, broken by our arms, would beg unbidden for baptism's renewal, while high Carthage, which long lay ruined, soon would rise again at mention of Christ's name.

The penalties that Spain deserved to pay under great Charles
would be exacted by the cross's banners, and every race and
tongue would sing of Jesus, and freely would approach the
holy font under Reims' holy bishop's tutelage [William of
Champagne]. - Townsend, *Twelfth-Century Epic*)

Returning to the *Anticlaudianus*, the terms of Alan's criticism of these two *Alexandreis* passages are telling. He writes that Walter, as well as being too audacious ("raising his dumb mouth to the heavens"), has composed a "tenebrosi carminis umbra," or "dark and shadowy ode." This language suggests that Alan finds the meaning of the *Alexandreis* obscure, right from the poem's beginning ("in primo limine," "at the very beginning of the course"), which in turn affects the identification of Louis and Philip with the Macedonian king. As discussed above, the *Alexandreis*'s *sic et non* poetics throughout its length additionally ensure that the meaning of Alexander is multifaceted and difficult to interpret, making the poem a "tenebrosi carminis umbra" more broadly.

The idea that Alan is criticizing what he perceives as moments of failed typology in the *Alexandreis* is strengthened if we look at the *Anticlaudianus*'s prose prologue.

In hoc etenim opere litteralis sensus suauitas puerilem
demulcebit auditum, moralis instructio perficientem imbuet
sensem, acutior allegorie subtilitas proficientem acuet
intellectum.

(For in this work the sweetness of the literal sense will soothe
the ears of boys, the moral instruction will inspire the mind
on the road to perfection, the sharper subtlety of the allegory
will whet the advanced intellect. - Sheridan)

Here Alan writes that he wants his readers ultimately to move from a literal understanding of the text – "litteralis sensus" – towards "acutior allegorie subtilitas" ("the sharper subtlety of the allegory"), that is, not to read merely for the literal sense of his text but to perceive its deeper spiritual implications. This passage therefore highlights the deeply allegorical intention of the *Anticlaudianus*'s own poetics, mirroring its use of classical stylistic tropes discussed above. Alan places a high value on allegorical composition and interpretation. Knowing this, his specific criticism of Walter's moment of now-obscure typology in the *Alexandreis*'s proem, and potentially also the identification of Alexander with Philip Augustus in book v, is surely

also a general criticism of his fellow poet's mode of composition. For Alan, allegory as a way of interpreting inherited classical material fails in the *Alexandreis*. This is correct: as I've already argued, the *Alexandreis* does not construct its hero to be predominantly allegorically read, being much more interested in creating contrasting, not typologically enabled, historical perspectives. The moments in which Walter does equate Alexander with contemporary rulers are confusing and brief, perhaps deliberately, and it is these features that Alan has observed and criticized in his own work.

The two poets and their texts thus have very different ideas about *translatio studii* with reference to classical literature. Alan's objection to aspects of Walter's poetics in the *Anticlaudianus* shows how important a matter he perceived this to be, as his criticism is passionate and polemical: "tenebrosi carminis umbra" is ironically not a "dark and shadowy" phrase at all, but very clear in its satirical target. No *sic et non* poetics for Alan. What we have seen here are hints at an implicit disagreement about the practice of classical reception and adaptation between Latin texts. Although of course the *Alexandreis* and the *Anticlaudianus* are very different poems in terms of subject matter, this is a disagreement that predominately operates at a hermeneutic level; it is not simply about appropriate *materia*, although that may well be a feature. For Alan, allegorical interpretation leading to spiritual enlightenment is the goal of his poetry, and classical material is its vehicle; for Walter, classical material is refracted through the complex lens of different historical eras and is not primarily a catalyst to spiritual interpretation. The contrast between Alan and Walter's hermeneutic approaches again highlights the variety possible within 'classicizing' compositions. Mora's observation of polemical passions in the process of classically-inspired authorship is confirmed in a different context, this time in relation to the hermeneutics via which *translatio* might be performed, and with reference to two connected Latin texts. These hermeneutic polemics clearly demonstrate the crucial importance of late antiquity when we consider 'classicizing' tendencies for medieval poetry.

Conclusion

This brief exploration of 'classicizing' poetry in the 1180s has demonstrated that unsurprisingly the use of classical material was hugely varied, mediated by late antique texts and traditions but also reflect-

ing contemporary literary practices. Indeed, the two Latin texts considered here are if possible more engaged with late twelfth-century intellectual culture – including material in the French vernacular – than with the undoubtedly influential classical texts on which this culture was ultimately based. Mora's ideas about *translatio studii* as an explicitly contested phenomenon involving passions and polemics certainly hold true for these texts. For Walter of Châtillon and Alan of Lille, the issue seems to be concern about the role of allegorical composition and interpretation, although they approach this from opposing angles. Ironically, despite their differences both poets appear to share the idea that allegory is a hermeneutic mode that should be used for sacred matters (such as interpreting Biblical texts), which may be why Walter excludes it from his secular historical narrative. The perception of allegory as a sacred mode, at the top end of the textual hierarchy, is standard in contemporary exegetical texts (like Hugh of St Victor's *De sacramentis*); it is interesting to see this issue of hierarchy hinted at in the different yet related world of *belles lettres*, although more research is needed to uncover its full impact.

Finally, this study has demonstrated that reading 'classicizing' poetry, whether against the background of classical texts or in relation to contemporary literary productions, inevitably leads us to late antiquity and to hermeneutics. The *Alexandreis*'s historicism and the *Anticlaudianus*'s allegory are both enabled by interpretative strategies that were developed in relation to classical texts during this period. Despite the break from the immediately preceding centuries implied by the term 'Renaissance,' the twelfth-century moment of literary rebirth cannot be easily detached from this lesser-known past. Connecting the classical era to the twelfth-century present, the giants to the dwarves, involves the rediscovery of not just that antique, pre-Christian past, but also of the centuries, institutions and interpretations that transmit it, often transformed, to the twelfth century and beyond.

Bibliography

- Adkin, Neil. "Alan of Lille on Walter of Châtillon: *Anticlaudianus* 1,167–170." *Classica et mediaevalia* 43 (1992): 287–315.
- . "The Date of Walter of Châtillon's *Alexandreis* Once Again." *Classica et mediaevalia* 59 (2008): 201–11.
- . "Walter of Châtillon: *Alexandreis* IV 206–207." *Mittellateinisches Jahrbuch* 32:1 (1997): 29–36.
- Alan of Lille. *Anticlaudianus*. Ed. Robert Bossuat. Paris: Vrin, 1955.

- . *Anticlaudianus*. Trans. James J. Sheridan. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1973.
- Alexandre de Paris. *The Medieval French Roman d'Alexandre*. II: *Version of Alexandre de Paris*. Ed. Edward C. Armstrong et al. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1937. Elliott Monographs 47.
- . *Le Roman d'Alexandre*. Trans. et introd. Laurence Harf-Lancner. Paris: Livres de poche, 1994. Lettres Gothiques.
- Benson, Robert L., Giles Constable, with , Carol D. Lanham, eds. *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982.
- Bridges, Venetia. "Passions and Polemics in Latin and Vernacular Alexander Literature of the Later Twelfth Century." *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 58 (2014): 87–113.
- Chance, Jane. "The Artist as Epic Hero in Alan of Lille's *Anticlaudianus*." *Mittelaltinisches Jahrbuch* 18 (1983): 238–47.
- Conte, Gian Biagio. *Latin Literature: A History*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999.
- Dronke, Peter. "Peter of Blois and Poetry at the Court of Henry II." *Mediaeval Studies* 38 (1976): 185–235.
- Fraker, Charles F. *The Libro del Alexandre: Medieval Epic and Silver Latin*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1993. North Carolina Studies in the Romance Languages and Literatures 245.
- Fulgentius. *Expositio Virgilianae continentiae secundum philosophos moralis*, in *Opera*. Ed. Rudolf Helm. Leipzig: Teubner, 1898. 83–107.
- Gibson, M. T., D. R. Shanzer, and N. F. Palmer. "Manuscripts of Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus* in the British Isles." *Studi medievali* ser.3 28:2 (1987): 905–1001.
- Harf-Lancner, Laurence. "Alexandre le Grand dans les romans français du moyen âge: un héros de la démesure." *Mélanges de l'école française de Rome: Moyen Âge* 112.1 (2000): 51–63.
- Haskins, Charles Homer. *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927.
- Hutchings, C. M. "L'*Anticlaudianus* d'Alain de Lille: étude de chronologie." *Romania* 50 (1924): 1–13.
- John of Salisbury. *Ioannis Saresburiensis Metalogicon*. Eds. John B. Hall and Katharine S. B. Keats-Rohan. Turnhout: Brepols, 1991. CCCM 98.
- Jung, Marc-René. *Études sur le poème allégorique en France au moyen âge*. Bern: Franke, 1971.
- Lafferty, Maura K. "Mapping Human Limitations: The Tomb Ecphrases in Walter of Châtillon's *Alexandreis*." *Journal of Medieval Latin* 4 (1994): 64–81.
- . *Walter of Châtillon's Alexandreis: Epic and the Problem of Historical Understanding*. Turnhout: Brepols, 1998. Publications of the Journal of Medieval Latin 2.
- Lamberton, Richard. *Homer the Theologian: Neoplatonist Allegorical Reading and the Growth of the Epic Tradition*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989.
- Macrobius. *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*. Trans. William Harris Stahl. New York: Columbia University Press, 1952.
- Marshall, Linda E. "The Identity of the 'New Man' in the *Anticlaudianus* of Alan of Lille." *Viator* 10 (1979): 77–94.
- Martianus Capella. *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*. Ed. James Willis. Leipzig: Teubner, 1983.
- Mora, Francine. "L'*Ylias* de Joseph d'Exeter: une réaction cléricale au Roman de Troie de Benoît de Saint-Maure." *Progrès, réaction, décadence dans l'occident médiéval*. Éd. Emmanuèle Baumgartner and Laurence Harf-Lancner. Publications Romanes et Françaises 231. Geneva: Droz, 2003. 199–213.
- Prudentius. *Psychomachia*. Ed. Emanuele Rapisarda. Catania: Università di Catania, 1962.
- Ratkowitsch, Christine. "Walter von Châtillon, *Alexandreis*." *Descriptio picturae: Die literarische Funktion der Beschreibung von Kunstwerken in der lateinischen Grossdichtung des 12. Jahrhunderts*. Vienna: Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1991. 129–211.
- Tilliette, Jean-Yves. "Introduction." *L'Iliade: épopée du XIIe siècle sur la guerre de Troie*. Trad. et notes sous la direction de Francine Mora, introd. Jean-Yves Tilliette. Turnhout: Brepols, 2003. 5–40.
- Townsend, David (trans.). *The Alexandreis of Walter of Châtillon: A Twelfth-Century Epic*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996.
- . "'Michi barbaries incognita linguae': Other Voices and Other Visions in Walter of Châtillon's *Alexandreis*." *Allegorica* 13 (1992): 21–37.
- Virgil. "Eclogue 4." *Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid 1–6, and Aeneid VII–XII and Appendix Vergiliana*. Ed. and trans. Henry Rushton Fairclough, rev. George P. Goold.

- Harvard, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999-2000. 63-64. 2 vols. Loeb Classical Library.
- Walter of Châtillon. *Galteri de Castellione Alexandreis*. Edited by Marvin L. Colker. Padua: Editrice Antenore, 1978.
- Ward Jones, Julian, and Elizabeth Frances Jones, eds. *The Commentary on the First Six Books of the Aeneid of Vergil Commonly Attributed to Bernardus Silvestris*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1977.
- Wilks, Michael. "Alan of Lille and the New Man." *Renaissance and Renewal in Christian History*. Ed. Derek Baker. Ecclesiastical History Society. Oxford: Blackwell, 1977. 137-57.